How AI Tools at Mailchimp Could Help Market Smaller Businesses

A new pair of marketing tools from Mailchimp aims to make machine learning capabilities more accessible to companies that don’t necessarily have the resources for a big data science division or expensive tech.

One, called Creative Assistant, will scan the design elements of a business’ website, then automatically produce pieces of marketing content for everything from social ads to Zoom backgrounds that match what the algorithm perceives to be the company’s branding. Another new feature will recommend the next step in a marketing plan based on the behavior of other companies that have used the service.

The goal is to help small and medium-sized businesses that might be overwhelmed by the prospect of running a creative campaign or lack access to the data science resources that are able to make content production more efficient and effective for larger organizations.

“Creating ads that look appealing and make [our small business users] look like they’re competitive against a bigger organization is a big piece for them,” said Mailchimp vp of data products David Dewey. “We hear it all the time—our users say they want to look as good as the quote-unquote big guys; they want to be able to compete against businesses that are bigger than theirs; they want to be able to punch above their weight.”

While a certain swath of the companies that use Mailchimp are

inherently creativity-based, Dewey said businesses that are more technical in nature (law firms or IT consultancies, for instance) can often struggle with the content creation aspect of the platform.

These companies are also much less likely to be invested in any sort of machine learning already. A recent report from IT company Spiceworks found that small and medium-sized businesses were about 10 times less likely to be using AI than larger enterprises—only about 3% of businesses under 5,000 employees reported having implemented the tech.

Janera Soerel, director of business development & client management at workplace management platform Better Spaces, said the company had never used any sort of AI before the pandemic pushed it to take more of its marketing digital and it turned to Mailchimp.

“It’s definitely been a steep learning curve. It’s the first time we’ve used AI-enabled marketing techniques before, but we’ve learned really fast and we’re doing well,” Soerel said. “It’s allowing us to scale much quicker than before.”

Dewey said the eventual goal of the project is to create a suite of software that can create and run entire marketing campaigns automatically when a user signs up for Mailchimp. The service would be able to dynamically create and schedule content across social, email and other digital channels.

“Right now, users are able to go in and create multi-channel campaigns on their own, but it’s a fairly significant amount of work to make that happen,” Dewey said. “We want to take that work off their plate and allow them to basically explain to us the concept of what they’re trying to market and allow us to take the the legwork of making all that work across multiple channels, take that off their plate for them and do it automatically.”

Meanwhile, other platforms that cater to small businesses are

offering even more experimental uses for creative AI. British website builder Zyro has integrated a state-of-the-art language generator AI called GPT-2 to write random bits of web copy or generate slogans for its small-business clients, and it more recently added a feature that creates a endless rudimentary logos from scratch.

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